

THE ACTUAL HISTORY OF THE ORIGIN OF JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY IN A NUTSHELL

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(*Continued*)

2. ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY

UNDER David the Hebrew state had risen to its greatest height. Under him the Hebrew tribes had all been reunited. The hope and desire was therefore a natural one, that those time would come again. The Old Testament has therefore many passages expressing the resurrection of the Davidic house and the reunion of all tribes under its government again, from where they had been scattered. This future Messiah, i. e. "the anointed of Yahveh" (Greek *Christos*) is described as the ideal king of justice and righteousness, who will destroy all wickedness and injustice in face of the general experience, that the kings of this world are no ideal kings, but rather often the reverse. The expectance of a resurrection of the Davidic house and the reunion of all tribes was long kept up, even when all hope had gone through the experiences after the exile, when the Jews passed from under the dominion of one world-empire to that of another. In fact the hope of the revival of the Davidic house and the reunion of all tribes really never died out entirely. But since all this could, as was seen, not come about in the course of natural events, it was thought to come about in a supernatural way. This was expressed for the first time in the middle of the second century, 165 B. C. by the unknown writer of the book of Daniel, which then came into existence, written for the purpose of keeping the Jews faithful to their religion, when the Greek-Syrian king, Antiochus Ephiphanes sought to destroy their religion. In the seventh chapter of Daniel a vision is given, describing the coming of one like a son of man, i. e., in human form, with the clouds of heaven, to whom

God gives power and an everlasting kingdom, in which "the saints", i. e., the Jews remaining faithful to their religion will share.

From that time on this expectation of the coming of the kingdom of God or kingdom of Heaven, the ideal, perfect one, was continually kept up by the Jews. Yes, repeated and numerous calculations and predictions were made of the time, just when it would come, all the way down from the first appearance of the book of Daniel till down to the end of the Jewish nation and the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple 70 A. D., by a number of Jewish writers, who wrote under the name of some former reputed person, just as the writer of Daniel did, as for instance, Enoch, the antediluvian, Moses, Elijah, Baruch, the friend of Jeremiah, Ezra, etc. These apocalyptical writings, because they pretend to give revelations of the future, though not in the Old Testament and generally little known, are very valuable, for without them we would not have a historical understanding of the origin of Christianity. To this class of writings belong also the Jewish Sibyllines, a collection of predictions written in Greek hexameter at different periods from about 146 B. C. till down to our era.

John the Baptist and Jesus, when they arose to preach the necessity of moral regeneration of their people, believed and proclaimed likewise that the coming of the kingdom of heaven was soon at hand. This expectation of the imminent end of the old world order through that miraculous event was the main idea, overshadowing all others, throughout the primitive period of Christianity, as can be seen in the New Testament everywhere, even after the death of Jesus.

In connection with the expectation of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God, partakers of which could only be those who evinced through repentance and change of heart and life, not those who confided simply in the descent from Abraham, according to the teachings of the Baptist and Jesus, must be considered the atonement idea, the idea of salvation from guilt through sacrifices, as it had been taught in the system of the Mosaic law developed since the exile. The idea preached by the first great literary prophets, that salvation and atonement is not brought about by external sacrifices, but only by thorough repentance and change of heart and life, had been again buried by the extensive atoning rituals of the law and by the conception of legal righteousness, that is the fulfillment of the many external ritualistic observances of the law. Jesus had

returned to the ideas of those great prophets again in his teachings, without though attacking the Mosaic law and putting it aside. From this he was prevented by his Jewish education, which impressed the divinity of the law. He had no critical insight into the actual historical development of that law. That he did not put aside that law, is shown by the fact, that his immediate followers, his own brothers, especially his brother James, and the first Jewish-Christian community, observed the law as before, though they revered Jesus as their great prophet and teacher and the exponent of a higher and more spiritual righteousness than the prevailing purely legalistic one. They probably also may have looked upon Jesus as some sort of revelation of the heavenly Messiah, who was with God from eternity, a general Jewish idea common at that time. They also very likely expected that he would come again, at the time of the coming of the heavenly kingdom, when "the saints", that is the Jews faithful to their religion, as the author of Daniel had said, would be sharers of the kingdom. Jesus himself had not intended to establish an entirely new religion, severed completely from the Mosaic law, nor had he claimed to be the sole mediator between God and man, taking the place of the old law (this is shown more fully farther down) as according to all his teachings, man attains direct forgiveness from God, if only he himself evinces true forgiveness to his fellowman and through a thorough change of heart and life.

The death which Jesus had undergone for his reformatory work was very probably also taken by his immediate followers in the sense of a kind of atoning death for his people, to arrest God's wrath against his people on account of their many transgressions, an idea not uncommon among the Jews at that time. For instance the death of the martyrs, who suffered for their religion during the times, when Antiochus Epiphanes sought to destroy the Jewish religion, was looked upon as a kind of atoning death for the whole people, which becomes evident from the prayer of the old martyr Eleazar in the apocryphal fourth book of the Maccabees.

It was Paul mainly, who gave definite shape to all the ideas which had attached themselves to the person of Jesus among his followers, so that a new world religion arose in Christianity, which cut loose from the Mosaic law entirely. Paul the former persecutor of the Jewish brotherhood gathered around the name of Jesus,

who had never come into personal contact with the human Jesus himself, and could therefore speculate more independently on his personality, was by education a strict Pharisee and observer of the law, but at the same time a man of deep moral introspection, as his letters show, with the conviction that man with all his earnest strivings falls short of fulfilling the moral law absolutely. To his deeply pessimistic view regarding the world and mankind since Adam's fall according to Jewish doctrine, was joined a nature prone to visions and ecstasies (often prevalent with epileptics such as he was) as we see from his letters. He was at the same time a Hellenistic Jew, not born in Palestine, but in the dispersion, that is the Jews, who lived among Gentiles. He was therefore quite probably, even if unconsciously, also influenced by prevailing ideas among Greeks concerning the soul's destiny, such as those of Plato, that the soul came down originally from heaven, to be bound by matter, but longed to get back to its former home again, released from the bonds of matter. He very probably also was unconsciously influenced by the ideas of those initiatory rites among Pagan peoples at that time, called mysteries, which promised salvation from evil and suffering, from retribution for sin and guilt in the beyond and immortality (the great yearning of antiquity) in the name of some god, who had gone down into death but rose from life again. Those gods were originally personified forces of nature, the sun or the seasons, waning and going down into death, but rising to life again, and later, when the god-conception became more spiritual and moral (a development taking place among Pagans as well as among the Hebrews), raised into the spiritual and moral sphere. As man was dependent upon the dying and resurrected God in his material life, so he was also dependent upon the dying and resurrected God in his spiritual and moral life. By getting into contact with the dying and resurrected God through certain initiatory rites, called mysteries, in the name of the respective god, it was believed, the qualities and powers of that God could be attained, in order to obtain salvation from evil and retribution for sin and guilt and to acquire immortality. It is significant that Paul calls his gospel and theory of salvation, which he claims to have received by divine revelation, not through man, not even through the Jewish brotherhood gathered about Jesus, a mystery also. Baptism and the eucharist are to him also mystical rites, by which the believer comes into personal contact with Christ, similarly as in those mysteries certain

baptisms, sacred meals and other rites were believed to bring into contact with the respective god, in whose name they were practiced.

The Greek surroundings, in which Paul was brought up very probably also unconsciously influenced his conception regarding the non-validity of the Mosiac law, at least for the Gentile believers in Jesus. The Mosaic law had even been a "yoke" as it was called to many Jews. To impose it with all its ritual upon proselytes from Gentiles to Jewish monotheism, was even before Paul, not thought to be necessary by some liberal Hellenistic Jews, as we know from history. Thus Paul also antagonizes in his letters the attitude of the Jewish Christians, to burden Gentile believers with the Mosaic law, circumcision, etc. In consequence of the development, which the mind of Paul had undergone in his speculations about sin, the law, both the moral and the ritualistic, salvation and the person of Jesus, we find him make extensive use of his rabbinical training, to set up his theory and system of justification by faith. Jesus is to Paul the metaphysical son of God, the revelation of the heavenly Messiah, who was with God from eternity, "the man from heaven," "the second man", "the last Adam", the perfect ideal man, who has fulfilled the moral law, which the first Adam had broken, bringing death to all his descendants. This heavenly Messiah, this last Adam had in Jesus come down upon earth, "He was born under the law, to redeem those under the law," to bear the curse of the law, which was hovering over every one not fulfilling it in its entirety, by His death. His death is the perfect atonement, which supersedes all the previous incomplete atonements. The belief in Jesus Christ, the perfect final sacrifice is the only salvation, of course, as Paul everywhere stresses, with the condition, that the believer also follows thoroughly the moral example of Christ in his life and becomes a new man. By the mystical union with Christ, who has gone into death, but risen again (the nature of this rising is discussed later) the believer will also attain the powers and qualities of him, to rise from death and acquire immortality. Baptism and the partaking of the eucharist in the name of Christ are not only the symbols of salvation in Christ, but also mystical rites, not only obliging the believer to a new life in Christ, but also conveying mystical powers to him through faith, to attain immortal life as Christ had attained. That Paul already attributed magical powers to baptism and the eucharist is proven by the fact that he does not condemn vicarious baptism, which Christians underwent for those who had died among

them without having received baptism, and because he attributes bodily disease and death to the unworthy celebration of the eucharist.

Paul's doctrine of salvation has influenced all later writers of the New Testament. From the standpoint of his theory the gospels, giving a sort of life of Jesus, though not critical biographies in our sense, but rather missionary tracts for the new faith, have been written. The belief that Jesus came to be the savior of the whole world through his death, the only mediator between God and man, is expressed in such a way, as if Jesus had already himself represented his work, death and person as the final and only means of salvation. In contrast to this stands the hard fact, that Jesus seems never to have said anything about the final abolition of the Mosaic law to his immediate disciples, or else that wrangling would not have been after his death in the first Christian communities about the question, whether Gentile believers should be bound to undergo circumcision and other Jewish rituals. Had it not been for the liberal standpoint of the Hellenistic Jew Paul, who vigorously denied the validity of the Mosaic law for Gentile believers, who proclaimed that Christ is the end of the law, the brotherhood gathered about the name of Jesus would have remained a purely Jewish sect and never would have expanded to a world religion. For the work of Jesus himself had been entirely within the Jewish sphere and in conformance with Jewish thought. Compare only one instance, the choosing of twelve disciples answering to the twelve Hebrew tribes.

The metaphysical sonship of God, which Paul attributed to Jesus was in the first gospel (not first in order of time: Mark, the second, is the oldest) and in the third expanded into the virgin birth of Jesus, in conformance with ancient notions of attributing miraculous births to illustrious men. Compare Zoroaster's virgin birth and Plato's sonship by Apollo, though his human father Ariston was known as well as Joseph, the husband of Mary. The virgin birth of Jesus was a consequence of the combination of the heavenly Christ, suppose to have existed with God from eternity, with the historical figure of Jesus. Paul had as yet said nothing of such a birth. Jesus had never claimed such a descent, while the term "son of God", "sons of God", as applied to men by him, means only spiritual sonship, as the older prophets used it, that is implying the doing of God's will and being like him, forgiving, merciful, just, etc.

On the other hand again, the latest, the fourth gospel, goes far

beyond the subordinate relation of Christ to God, as Paul had stated it. While Paul never made Christ coequal to God, the evidently Gentile author of this gospel, while saying nothing of a miraculous birth, represents Jesus, whose humanity still appears clearly in the earlier gospels, throughout as a psychologically impossible personality, humanly considered, and in an almost Pagan manner as the visible God himself, all knowing, all powerful, etc., appearing on earth.

A similar materializing process took place in regard to the resurrection story. While Paul had placed the appearance of Jesus to him long after his death (evidently a vision) on the same plane with the appearances to the immediate followers of Jesus, which were logically therefore visions also, and while the oldest gospel, Mark, relates no appearance at all, for that part beginning with verse nine of its last chapter was not in the original manuscript, and is a later addition pieced together from Matthew and Luke, the appearances in the other gospels from Matthew on grow more and more materialistic, culminating finally in the corporeal ascension in Acts, which even transcends the report of Suetonius that the souls of Caesar and Augustus were seen to ascend to Heaven from the funeral pyre.

The gospels, though resting of course on the traditions of the first Jewish followers of Jesus, are all later products written in their present form in Gentile surroundings and for the growing Gentile Christian churches. They evince a general knowledge of the life of Jesus, of Jewish customs and life in Palestine and its geography but that is all. Even the oldest gospel, Mark, the nearest to the first traditions of the Jewish followers of Jesus, and whose general plan and arrangement Matthew and Luke follow, but always correcting it linguistically (its Greek) and dogmatically from later developed standpoints, and which gospel yet tells the significant story of the mother and brothers of Jesus once coming to take him home while preaching, because they considered "him out of his senses", evidently not satisfied with his course, a story not in accord with Matthew and Luke, according to whom Mary knew of her son's miraculous birth and future, even this gospel, Mark, speaks of "the mountain", to which Jesus goes when appointing his disciples, as if there were only one mountain in Galilee.² The most

²The translation in Mark iii. 21 "friends" is wrong. It must be "relatives", which the Greek *hoi par antou* always means. This is supported by v. 31 of the same chapter, where his mother and brothers are mentioned.

striking departure from the actual life of Jesus, which yet appears to some extent in the earlier gospels, is of course taken in the latest gospel, the fourth, which is not historical, but purely speculative, dwelling exclusively on the appearance of the only begotten son of God on earth in contrast to the Jews who are the begotten of the Devil. This gospel cuts loose entirely from any remaining Jewish traces of the natural origin of Christianity. In it naturally the idea of a visible realistic kingdom of God on earth, the kingdom of Israel, the reunion of all tribes, which even crops out still in the ascension story of Acts, the realization of which idea even a Paul expected to see yet while living, finds no place anymore. And while according to Matthew Jesus says: "I am only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," evidently historically expressing the sphere to which Jesus naturally limited his work, the fourth gospel unhistorically reports Jesus as already saying: "I have still other sheep, which are not of this fold, them also must I lead, and they shall hear my voice, and they shall become one flock, one shepherd."

If anywhere in history, we see in the severance of Judaism and Christianity the tragical results of a theory of religion expressed in a rigid legalistic system of worship, claimed to be divinely revealed to Moses, and setting up a partition wall between Jews and Gentiles, which the ideas of the great Hebrew prophets would have prevented, had they been successful, as they were in entire consonance with the best thought of the great poets and thinkers of Greece, such as Heraclitus, Xenophanes, Euripides, etc., who also taught that true worship of the Godhead consists in spiritual and ethical worship. Jesus had to fall as a victim to this system, because he was unconsciously freer than the system in which he was brought up and Paul, though he only denied the validity of the Mosaic law for Gentile believers in Jesus, barely escaped the same fate which befell Jesus, on his last visit to Jerusalem. Such was the power of the incubus of the supposed divinity of the Mosaic law, which had fastened itself upon the Jewish people!

It is of course natural, that a theory of salvation as Paul taught it, would find many adherents. The longing for salvation from sin and its punishment in the beyond was everywhere prevalent at that time together with the longing for immortality. If the theory taken in itself had dangerous implications with regard to morality, it was counterbalanced, as said before, by the demands

of a pure and high morality, to be like Christ. The theory of Paul further implied that in Christ all believers were equal before God, whether master or slave, whether high or low, whether rich or poor, whether man or woman, whether Jew or Gentile. They were all brothers in Christ. This was the strength of the new religion, besides that it was attached to a historical personality, who had actually lived and was no mythical figure, as the saviors proposed in the Pagan mysteries, though of course the conception of the heavenly Messiah, preexistent with God, the last or second Adam, as having appeared in Jesus is in the last end mythical also.

The expectation of a speedy return of Christ, which the first Christians had, did not become true. The developing Christian church therefore gradually postponed the return of Christ, and the coming of the kingdom of heaven upon earth, to the far future. First they expected that event to take place at the fall of the Roman empire, which they in common with the Jews supposed to be the last empire according to the interpretation of the book of Daniel, while according to the view of its author the last empire of that book was the Greek-Macedonian, preceded by the Persian, Mede and Babylonian. Further as the product of the last empire, Antiochus Epiphanes, was looked upon as the anti-God, the incarnation of the Evil one, by the Jews at his time, so later through the false interpretation of Daniel, the Roman empire was thought to be the anti-God, the incarnation of the Evil one, in consequence of the dominion of the Romans over the Jews and such attempts of Roman Emperors, like Caligula, to put their statues in the temple of Jerusalem. The cult of the Roman emperor as a divine being, which Caligula claimed for himself and then later Domitian, could only strengthen the Jewish conception, that the Roman empire was anti-Godly, they being stern monotheists. This idea was accepted by Christians also, who likewise were monotheists and rejectors of idolatry. The demands of the Roman government and state religion, to offer incense to the statue of the emperor, to which Christians objected, were very often the cause of the persecution of Christians. No wonder that in their eyes the Roman state was considered as the incarnation of the Anti-Christ, just as Antiochus Epiphanes had been considered by the Jews as the incarnation of the Anti-God.

But the Christian religion constantly grew in numbers in spite of occasional persecution. The ancient polytheism connected with idolatry, was in the wane already among many before Christianity,

and when Christianity with its more spiritual monotheism, already propagated before its advent by the many Jews in the Roman empire, appeared on the scene, combined with its doctrine of salvation and a pure morality, it was bound to make conquests among many, especially since its religious and moral doctrines were combined with the doctrine of the universal brotherhood of man, though this was not something entirely new, as it had already been taught by the Stoics and other philosophers and Greek poets, but first really brought into practical effect in Christian circles, when people of all classes were considered as members of one body, under the head fo Christ.

Up to the time of Constantine the Great, 306-337 A. D., Christianity had so grown in numbers, that he finally conceded complete tolerance from political reasons to Christianity, which had till then by some emperors only been allowed a limited tolerance aside of the old polytheistic state religion. From Constantine on, Christianity gradually became the state religion. The religion, which once had been persecuted now began to persecute itself, in order to extend Christianity. The Roman empire once looked upon as the incarnation of the Anti-Christ, was headed by Christian emperors. It fell to pieces under the strokes of Christianized Germanic tribes. How far different had the original ideas of Christianity, with which it started, turned out! The bishops of Rome had gradually taken the place of the Roman pontiff, instead of the Pagan Roman highpriest, the highpriest and Pope of Christianity reigned. The religion, which had started with the idea, that Christ is the only mediator between God and man, had ended with the Pope, who claimed to be the representative of Christ on earth, the successor of Peter on the basis of Matth. xvi. 18. Mark, the oldest gospel, had related, that Peter once declared Jesus to be the Christ, whereupon Jesus told his disciples not to say anything about this to others. Matthew has the same story. But it is the only gospel, which relates in connection with it, that Jesus told Peter, that upon this rock (Peter means rock) he would build his church and the gates of Hades would not prevail against it, or as some manuscripts have "against thee" (Peter). Since Hades only means the abode of death, never Hell as the place of punishment, and at the end of the chapter Jesus is quoted as saying, that there were standing around him some, who should not see death, before the coming of the son of man and his kingdom, all Christian interpreters up to 340 A. D. explain this

passage as meaning, that Peter would not see death before the coming of the Messianic reign, of course as they meant, as we shall see later, the spiritual reign of Christ. Since the Matthew passage is the only one, in which Jesus speaks of his believers as his church and the expectance of the imminent coming of the son of man in his kingdom precluded a church, these words must be assumed to be a later interpolation. The words which then follow, proclaiming Peter as the doorkeeper of heaven, and possessing its keys and the power of binding and loosing, were interpreted by the church fathers (thus Tertullian d. 220 A. D.) as meaning that Peter was the first one, who unbarred on the day of Pentecost the entrance to the heavenly kingdom by baptism in the name of Jesus, through which were loosed the sins, that before time were bound, while the non-acceptance of baptism had a binding power. As bishop Callistus of Rome (217-222 A. D.) was the first one, who refers the words to Peter to himself, as the successor of Peter, and before him no church father, not even Irenaeus (d. 220 A. D.) who accentuated the precedence of the Roman church, because founded by Peter and Paul, knows nothing of a superior power of Peter before the other apostles, these words are open to suspicion of being a gradual development, in order (1) to establish the superiority of Christianity as a mode of salvation over against other mystical cults promising salvation, mixtures of all kinds of older religious speculations, especially Mithraism; (Mithra was said to be rock-begotten. In his sanctuaries, the figure of the Mithraic Kronos, the god of time, had an especial place, represented with the keys of heaven, to open and close its doors in order to let the souls ascend and descend) (2) to establish the prerogative of the Roman bishops, as the successors of Peter. (The terms "bind" and "loose", amplifications of the term "keys", later received a juridical sense, i. e. to excommunicate, or to revoke excommunication).

As the kingdom of God had not come miraculously down from heaven upon earth, it was thought to be represented on earth as far as the Christian church existed with its form of worship and belief. Therefore the expositors of the New Testament passages, in which Jesus spoke of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God and the end of the world in the time of the generation among which he lived, interpreted those passages as referring to the growth and propagation of Christianity. The word "generation" of which Jesus said, that it would not pass away before that event, was in-

terpreted as meaning either the Jewish or the whole human race. If Jesus said that some of them standing about him, would not see death before that event, this was interpreted as meaning that his disciples would not die, before the spiritual kingdom of Christianity, the beginning of the Church had been established in Judea and the surrounding countries. All this was done of course, because Jesus was supposed not to have erred in his expectations. The doctrine that Christ would come again as the final judge and establisher of his absolute reign of course was still held and taught by the church, but this coming now seemed to be in the far future. The gospels had taught, when the end did not come so quickly as was originally thought, that it would not come before Christianity had been preached everywhere in the then small known world, the Roman empire. But the world gradually became larger and larger during the following centuries, with an ever increasing number of peoples, who had heard nothing of Christianity. Consequently according to the new interpretation of the gospels the end of the world must still be far off. Christianity of course continued to be preached among the ever increasing new known peoples in Europe during the Middle Ages from the fall of the Roman empire on, 476 A. D. but this preaching was always accompanied also by force, by subduing them to Christianity with the sword. In modern times Christianity of course was not spread anymore in that outrightly brutal manner, but the Christian missionaries were backed by the power and protection of their respective countries. In many instances the preaching of Christianity followed the trade in newly opened non-Christian lands, or the trade followed Christianity, so that Christianity was not preached entirely unalloyed with worldly and commercial interests and exploitation.

It is questionable, whether the doctrine of the second advent of Christ is held in the literal sense anymore by many Christian churches, though they still profess the so-called Apostolical creed, in which this advent is professed. In fact many doctrines of the original Church in course of time up to our day were interpreted according to the views and dogmas of the individual churches, into which Christianity had split up, and not according to the original historical sense of the early Christian doctrines. Of course the early church already was not uniform in its views. Thus even the doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ, though taught in two gospels, was no generally accepted belief in the first two centuries, as the church father Justin

Martyr of the middle of the second century tells us. In fact the Christian Church has ever been not only an *ecclesia militans* against non-Christian religions, but a militant Church in its own midst, one branch quarreling with and defaming another branch, far from being "one flock and one shepherd" as the fourth Gospel taught. But just these differences of doctrines and conceptions make it possible for us to get an insight into the natural evolution of Christianity, just as the different layers of the so-called Mosaic law and the differences of the historical books of the Old Testament give us an insight into the natural evolution of Judaism. If there were not the flagrant contradictions in both the Old and New Testament and everything were of one cast in them, both Judaism and Christianity might appear as some supernatural infallible revelation or some invention of priestcraft. If Hebrew history for instance had only been presented for us in the way the books of Chronicles represents it, making it agree with the Mosaic law, we would never have gotten a true insight into Hebrew history and Judaism. Just the flagrant differences in both religions show that they were purely evolutions of the religious side of the human mind, which is subject to truth and error as well in religion as in other spheres, science, politics, etc. This of course does not mean that it is not possible to ever get at the basis of truth, but that truth can only be arrived at by a critical investigation of all facts, and weighing them against each other. The truly religious side of the human mind will not suffer thereby, for man was from the beginning religious and will ever be.